

Some Libyans in US are strong supporters of Qaddafi

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In a discreet office in suburban Virginia, not far from the Central Intelligence Agency, a small group of Libyan students is doing its part to advance the revolution of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

Last spring, the headquarters of the People's Committee for Students of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya Inc. was under 24-hour surveillance by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents. The FBI was investigating an alleged Libyan plot to assassinate anti-Qaddafi dissidents living in exile in the United States. No indictment was ever returned, but officials claim their actions helped foil assassination plots in four states.

Now, with recent statements by Colonel Qaddafi suggesting possible Libyan-backed terrorist actions in the US, the spotlight is once again on the student-run office in McLean, Va.

"This is a friendship office that is dealing purely with students," says Saleh Juma, a graduate student studying international management at Washington's Southeastern University — and one of four "student chairmen" who run the office. "We are building bridges of communication between us and the American people to understand each other better."

Mr. Juma, who says he has studied in the US on and off since 1977, denies his group has been or could be used to carry out attacks within the US. "We aren't people who look for war. We are people who look for peace and justice and equal-

ity," Juma says. "To me this is nonsense. A small country like Libya will hit targets in the US from such a far range?"

Nonetheless, the FBI is taking seriously Qaddafi's Jan. 2 warning that he would "pursue US citizens in their country and streets" in retaliation for US sanctions over the recent terrorist attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports. "There definitely is an infrastructure here in the United States that, if tasked by Mr. Qaddafi, could attempt to commit acts of terrorism," an FBI official says.

According to Immigration and Naturalization Service statistics, there are 3,200 to 3,300 Libyan citizens in the US on visas. Of these, 1,200 to 1,300

are students. There are also several thousand Libyans with anti-Qaddafi sentiments who have been granted asylum in the US or who are here illegally.

If the White House orders bombs dropped on Libya, will Mr. Juma be activated by Colonel Qaddafi for guerrilla activities in the US?

"I can't comment on that because I don't have that much knowledge about the situation. But I can comment on one thing: If the USA attacks Libya, I believe the war will escalate in the Middle East and will be an endless war," Juma says.

The office in McLean is one of only two official Libyan offices in the US. It oversees the administration of student loans and scholarships for Libyan students. The other office is Libya's United Nations mission in New York City. The Libyan Embassy in Washington was

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closed and US diplomatic relations suspended in 1981 following the attempted assassination of a dissident Libyan student attending Colorado State University.

Libyan students in the US have complained about the cloud of suspicion that seems to follow them. Several students have voiced concerns about FBI surveillance.

Juma says he was tailed by federal agents around the clock last spring, adding that he suspects that he is still being watched and that his phones are tapped. "It is something we have to live with, it is a fact of life," he says. But he stresses, "We are not doing anything. We are conducting our student activities, carrying our full [academic] load, keeping our visa status current — if they want to accuse us, that is their problem, not ours."

And he adds, bitterly, "That is a strange manifestation of democracy and freedom for those who deem to give lessons in it. We [Libyans] feel it here as students."

From the point of view of US security personnel, it pays to be cautious. In May 1984, two 36-year-old Libyan "students" were arrested in Philadelphia after they purchased three .45 caliber pistols and two bulletproof vests from an undercover FBI agent. One of the two students was later identified by US law enforcement officials as an Libyan intelligence officer.

In addition, last May, Farhat Tibar, an administrative attaché at Libya's mission to the United Nations, was expelled from the US after the FBI linked him to a purported plot to assassinate anti-Qaddafi Libyans in the US.

Asked about Qaddafi's alleged 1980 death sentence on Libyan dissidents, Juma says, "I don't think Brother Qaddafi did give the order to do such a thing." Juma says he suspects Libyan hit-squad stories were "created by the secret services to create paranoia in the United States or to justify an action that could be taken against Libya."

Juma emphasizes that Qaddafi and the Libyan people are not opposed to the citizens of the United States. "We don't have a problem with the American people; the American administration has a problem with us."

Juma adds, "We do not have nuclear arsenals six miles or 10 miles from your shores. But they [the US Sixth Fleet] do. That's what is terrorizing us," he says.

The Libyan student also denounced US plans to topple or assassinate Qaddafi. The Washington Post reported last fall that the Reagan administration was considering a proposal to undermine the power of the Libyan leader.

"This is not the first time the US administration is involved in assassination attempts on Brother Qaddafi," Juma says, charging that an October 1984 attack on Qaddafi was a joint Sudanese-US plot.

"What is not understood by the American people is you do not jeopardize the life of one person, you are challenging the masses of 3.5 to 4 million [Libyan] people. They are ready to die to be independent and to defend the revolution."

Recent tensions with Libya led Sen. Howard M. Metzenbaum (D) of Ohio to suggest last week that perhaps Qaddafi should be "eliminated."